Castlemaine Naturalist

March 2016

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Yellow-footed Antechinus - photo by Geraldine Harris

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2015

It is that time of year when I am required to produce a report regarding the good and the bad things that have occurred within the club during the past year. I will start with the bad things – there have been none! Perhaps not, there have been some slightly less good things. One issue has been the club outings which take place on the Saturday after each club general meeting. With the notable exception of the Eltham Copper Butterfly expedition held late last year, the attendance has been small and on occasions the Committee has cancelled them. At the December General Meeting, Rita took the opportunity to remind those present that we are a ***Field*** Naturalists Club and that means we should spend some time in the field. That is not an instruction to members; it is more an appeal to the Committee that interesting outings should be planned which encourage members to join in. We will try our best to accomplish this in 2016.

On the good side, we have managed to persuade many interesting speakers to address the club on General Meeting nights. I will not go through them, but looking at the list I can't recall any failures and that is not intended to put any pressure on tonight's speaker! Speaking personally, another success has been the way in which the Committee has worked during the year. Committee Meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month starting a 6pm and usually finishing by 7pm in time to get home for tea. Apart from dealing with the business of the month in an efficient manner, the way in which it is handled leads to a very pleasant evening each month. I have very little to do with all that and I would like to recognise the way in which committee members have responded. Perhaps I could ask all Committee members to stand up and perhaps all members might express their audible appreciation.

I do not wish to single out any individual, but I would like to thank Geoff Harris for filling in at short notice to the task of Treasurer and we have already noticed a difference in the way a real accountant goes about the job. That is not a criticism of Elvene or the earlier treasurer (me); it is simply an acknowledgement of Geoff.

It is now the time at which the entire committee becomes open for election. I made an appeal in the last newsletter for members to consider and I have expressed tonight the nature of holding a Committee position, it is really very easy and to have different points of view can only help the club continue to progress. There is one particular position which I would like to draw you attention to, being that of Newsletter Editor. Noel has held this position for some eight years and we have been able to convince him to continue for just one more year. It would be good if we could get someone to take over this year – perhaps even two people, one to be responsible for the computer part of the job, putting the document together and another person to make sure there is sufficient content for the month. Noel would be very happy to explain how the job is done.

So, that's it for this year and I hope we can look forward to another year of positive outcomes.

NIGEL HARLAND - President

A "What bird am I" for your children or grandchildren

I work in a team, we do gardening.
We live in Castlemaine.
We wear white overalls.
We get a bit red in the face.
We chat a lot and grumble, too.
When we get cross we yell out.
We can get away fast.

Rosemary Turner
(For grandson Tom, age 5, who found the answer)

Roadside Cleanup 20.2.16

The roadside cleanup was successfully completed and thankfully there was less rubbish than usual. Thank you Lorna, George, Jeremy, Peter and Geoff.

Next roadside Cleanup: May 7, 2016

A Walk in the Bush after Rain 31/1/2016

Geraldine Harris

After 16.5mls of rain it was so good walking in the bush minus the crunch and in the damp. There were Small St John's Worts (Hypericum gramineum) starting to flower in the bare paddock, where the topsoil was only being held together by persevering wallaby grasses and dry mosses and lichens, that had been briefly transformed by the rain into a green carpet.

A little further along the track I watched a pair of Grey Fantails searching for food on the ground with a couple of Yellow Thornbills that occasionally flew high into the Grey Box (Eucalyptus microcarpa) before returning to forage in the leaf litter.

On the ground there were small cream blossoms and the tiny red-coloured pointed buds of the Red Stringybark (E. macrorhyncha) and ants at a large nest were quietly working around holes that were surrounded by a huge amount of small stones and twigs – presumably removed during the construction of the nest below ground. The only other flowers in site were a few very dry specimens of Xerochrysum viscosum left over from spring.

There is so much fallen timber in the bush after such a dry summer. Large trees have finally succumbed to the dry conditions and many others have lost large limbs. Areas of wattles have died and are falling over. Starkly contrasted with all the fallen dry timber is the freshly washed green foliage and the lovely colours of large contorted strips of fallen bark lying on the ground and hanging in the forks of trees. As I reach the high point I can see Mt Franklin and Mt Kooroocheang in the distance.

Walking down into a gully I follow the damp trail of the water that has left waves of litter caught in the fallen branches on the ground and filled a series of small eroded holes along the way. Further along this gully I stop to take some photos of a Cherry Ballart and more mosses, lichens and worts that have sprung into life in response to the damp. I also watched a lone meat ant with an eye-catching silken brown abdomen make his way along the fallen trunk of a tree.

At one point the whole of the gully wall has been painted a grey green by the presence of lichen. I am delighted to be able to stop and graze on some small but very sweet blackberries growing further along the steeply eroded gully in a position that has evaded the reach of the weed control man.

On my way home I cross a paddock where the parallel rows of an old orchard are clearly visible with the ground so denuded of vegetation. And as I turn into the house I am treated with a good view of a lone Dusky Woodswallow that is disturbed by two Brown Treecreepers working over the trunks of some Brown Stringybark.

Only days later it is dry and crunchy again.

Page 4:

Smooth, beaked and twisted buds of Red Stringybark (Eucalyptus macrorhyncha)

Ant's nest surrounded by twigs and stones

Golden Jelly Bells (Heterotextus sp.)

Meat Ant

Coloured bark

Pool and debris

Page 5:

Liverwort sp.

Moss

Moss

Remnant orchard rows.

Grey-green gully with lichen.

photos Geraldine Harris

A walk in the bush after rain

The scale of attack

Chris Timewell

This following story was initially published in the *Bendigo Advertiser* on 29th December 1904, and then republished by other newspapers across the country over the following days and weeks.

FIGHT BETWEEN A SNAKE AND TWO LIZARDS
A Singular Occurrence. Castlemaine, 28th December.
A curious encounter was witnessed yesterday at Lady Gully, near the North Perservance Company's shaft, between a brown snake 4ft. long and a couple of large lizards. The reptile was seen to be trying to destroy a lizard, when a second one came upon the scene, and joined in the attack upon the snake. The spectator went in haste to (get) a sapling, with which to dispatch the snake, his sympathy being with the lizards, but on his return he found he was too late, and the three combatants, locked together, tumbled down the North Perservance shaft. The two miners working at the bottom of the shaft at 100 ft., received an awful shock when the reptile and his adversaries fell between them. The men, on realizing the situation, promptly dispatched all three belligerents with their picks.

My understanding is that 'Lady Gully' referred to in this article occurred (occurs?) somewhere to the north of Moonlight Flat – east or north-east of central Castlemaine. However I am not very knowledgeable about local goldfield geography, so I'm happy to be corrected here. I wonder what sort of 'lizards' were involved in this fight with the Brown Snake? Perhaps it refers to goannas? Blue tongues? Stumpy tails?

Bathing birds

Peter and Rosemary Turner

We have good views of our bird baths from both dining and sitting area, and (like many members) enjoy the passing visitors - often during breakfast and our evening meal. In addition to those pictured here, regular visitors include Spotted and Striated Pardelotes, New Holland, Yellow-faced and Brown-headed Honeyeaters, a family of Blue Wrens, Scrubwrens, Eastern Spinebills, Grey Fantails, Weebills and Yellow and Striated Thornbills.

The larger birds splash the water around (requiring daily refills) - the unwelcome Blackbirds are frequent bathers, but we've had Grey Currawongs in the past, and on 22nd February these two Crimson Rosellas spent many minutes washing, while Silvereyes and Red-browed Finches waited around for their turn.

The importance of gardens that are attractive to our native birds is well established, but we still find it disconcerting to return from a bird watching session in the nearby woodlands to find far more species around Munro Court than were seen in the bush.

Observations

At the February meeting -

- Rosemary Turner reported her sighting of a **Satin Flycatcher** over two days near a waterhole in the creek at Munro Court, North Castlemaine. She mentioned that there had been a sighting reported on 'birdline' [January 21, 7am; Castlemaine botanic gardens near the small footbridge by Damien Hendrickson - ed] and that Chris Tzaros notes it as 'rare' in the box-ironbark forest region.
- Sightings by several of a lone Wedge-tailed Eagle over south Castlemaine
- Geoff Harris related an encounter by Geraldine of a Brown snake in the lounge room and how she managed to dispatch it with a shovel. On lifting the basket from whence it came she was surprised by a marbled Gecko and dropped the basket, thus dispatching the Gecko.
- Helen and Kit had a strange encounter with a very tame Little Wattlebird at Venus Bay in January, which insisted on perching on heads and cameras for some distance until it transferred to a party going the opposite way. Was it hand reared?

later -

- Richard at Lake Pertobe 9/2; Swan, Black Duck, Great Egret, Pelican, Purple Swamphen, Darter, Coot, Masked Lapwing, Silver Gull; and Mordialloc ck., 11/2; Straw-necked Ibis, Darter, Little Pied and Little Black Cormorant, Black Duck, Maned Duck, Coot and Moorhen
- Wesley hill: 19 February; mixed flock of 5 Red-browed Finches, 3 Yellow-rumped Thornbills and 5 Superb Wrens 'doing over' the back yard. Feb 28; Solitary Wedge-tailed Eagle rising in a thermal over Happy Valley - Noel Young

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Fri March 11 meeting: speaker to be confirmed

Sat March 12 - no field trip planned this month; the trip to upper Coliban Res., (leader Julian Hollis) which was cancelled because of a total fire ban, is tentatively moved to April 9.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2016
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2016 Committee

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